

Public comments sought for proposed rules for court interpreters

May 4, 2011

The Administrative Office of Courts seeks public comments on proposed Standards for Court Interpreters and a proposed Code of Ethics for Court Interpreters. May 31 is the deadline for submitting comments.

AOC is working toward creation of a statewide program to provide credentialing of language interpreters for court proceedings. The credentialing program will provide three levels of proficiency: eligible, registered and certified.

Currently, each court in the state makes its own arrangements when language interpreters are needed in a court proceeding. The AOC program will provide judges in all state courts with the resource of a list of language interpreters who have demonstrated proficiency in oral and written translation of court proceedings.

The rules for court interpreters will apply to municipal court, justice court, youth court, county court, circuit court, chancery court, and grand jury proceedings.

Standards for language interpretation in courts were adopted by the National Center for State Courts' Consortium for Language Access in the Courts. The Mississippi AOC is a member of the Consortium. Court interpreters who are certified in other Consortium member states may seek reciprocity.

Copies of the entire proposed rules are available on the Mississippi Judiciary web site: [http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/rules/rulesforcomment/2011/Ethics for Court Interpreters.pdf](http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/rules/rulesforcomment/2011/Ethics%20for%20Court%20Interpreters.pdf) and [http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/rules/rulesforcomment/2011/MS Standards for Court Interpreters.pdf](http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/rules/rulesforcomment/2011/MS%20Standards%20for%20Court%20Interpreters.pdf).

Members of the bench, bar and the public wishing to submit comments may do so in writing to the Administrative Office of Courts, Gartin Justice Building, Post Office Box 117, Jackson, Mississippi 39205-0117.

The proposed Standards for Court Interpreters acknowledges the need for language interpreters to assure equal access to the courts. A comment to the rules says, in part, "For those individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), the failure to comprehend the English language can be a barrier to understanding and exercising their legal rights and may result in the deprivation of meaningful access to the judicial system by those individuals. This rule is promulgated to assist the courts in this state in providing equal access to the courts for LEP individuals."

The Preamble to the proposed Code of Ethics says, "Many persons who come before the courts of this state are partially or completely excluded from full participation in the proceedings due to limited English proficiency (LEP). It is essential that any communication barrier be removed, as far as possible, so that these limited English proficiency (LEP) individuals are placed on equal footing with similarly situated persons for whom there is no such barrier. Interpreters are highly skilled professionals who fulfill an essential role in the administration of justice. As officers of the court, interpreters help assure that LEP individuals enjoy equal access to justice and that court proceedings and court support services function efficiently and effectively."

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